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ABSTRACT

Findings from the Beginning School Study, conducted in Baltimore (Maryland) are used to show how differences in family circumstances translate into beliefs and activities that help or hinder children's development. The Beginning School Study started in 1982 and has followed 790 randomly selected Baltimore students from first-grade in 1982 through the present. Children's transition into full-time schooling, especially their progress over the first two grades, constitutes a critical period for academic and social development. The first two chapters set the stage by discussing the nature of early schooling and how social inequality impinges on it. Chapter 3, "Low Socioeconomic Status," considers socioeconomic status as the largest source of inequality in education. Chapter 4 focuses on school organization, while Chapters 5 ("Family Configuration") and 6 ("The Pluses and Minuses of Being Male") focus on family organization and gender, respectively. In Chapter 7 the discussion is reviewed and integrated. A focus on the first grade shows that schools are layered according to the economic resources of the population, and that this layering stems from stratification between neighborhoods. The problem is not with the schools, but in the distribution of resources across families and neighborhoods. Six appendixes provide information about the design and procedures of the Beginning School Study and how its variables were measured. (Contains 4 figures, 29 tables, and 396 references.) (SLD)

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